This course explores the nature of modern environmentalism through analysis of the recent past and present, but with particular emphasis on the future. The course ultimately attempts to answer the question: What will Planet Earth and our environment look like in the year 2100? The examination begins with literature from the early Industrial Revolution regarding utopia. The course then explores historical attempts to actually create cultural utopias, and how such systems contrasted, and often clashed, with existing societal and governmental forms during the 19th and 20th centuries. Next, the course explores various perceptions of dystopia in the same time period through literature and other popular culture forms, with the focus on what intellectuals of the day believed the future held for humankind. The course then gives an overview of late 20th-century environmental predictions and prophecies, with the objective of connecting some aspects of environmentalism with utopian and dystopian visions. Finally, Environmental Futures examines what the 21st century might hold for the planet’s biosphere—and for the human race.

Please purchase the following:

193EF Reader available at the Alternative in the UCEN

Ray Bradbury, Fahrenheit 451

Ernest Callenbach, Ecotopia

George Orwell, 1984

Note: Only Ecotopia is on the ordered book list. Please obtain copies of 1984 and Fahrenheit 451 any way you like. They are available on Kindle, through Amazon, and at used or new book stores. I will also have copies of each on two-hour reserve in the RBR.

Exams: There will be an in-class midterm and a take-home final. The paper on Ecotopia and Fahrenheit 451 will be part of the take-home final. The midterm is valued at one-third of the final grade, and take-home final is valued at two-thirds of the final grade.

Schedule

Part One: Defining Utopia in Place and Time

October 6: Introduction

October 8: Defining Utopia

October 13: Dystopia and The Time Machine

October 15: The Time Machine
Part Two: Industrialization and Dystopia

October 20: Defining Dystopia

October 22: Interwar and Depression

October 26: Totalitarianism and the Human Future

October 28: Orwellian Dystopia


MIDTERM IN CLASS: NOVEMBER 3

Part Three: Environmental Futures in the Environmental Age

November 5: World War II and the Terrible Future

November 10: Rachel Carson’s Environmental Future

November 12: Too Many People; Too Much Pollution; begin *Ecotopia*

November 17: Back to the Future in Nature; begin *Fahrenheit 451*

November 19: Socialism, Communalism, Capitalism, and the Future

Part Four: Looking Backward from the Year 2100

November 24: Recent Future Interpretations

November 26: No class

December 1: Machines in Our Future

December 3: Dystopian Environmental Futures; complete novels

December 8: Bradbury, Callenbach, and Looking Backward from 2100

December 10: Conclusion


Please turn cell phones off during class.